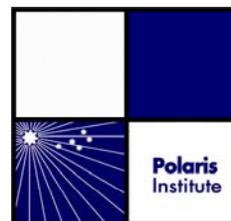


# **Campus Water Fountains: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY**



**By: Polaris Institute  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### **Polaris Institute**

*The Polaris Institute is a public interest research and advocacy organization based in Canada. Since 2004 Polaris has researched the impacts of the bottled water industry and actively campaigned for municipal, provincial, federal and local bottled water restrictions. The [www.insidethebottle.org](http://www.insidethebottle.org) campaign is a national program of the Institute. The following information is part of a forthcoming broader piece of research on provincial water takings legislation in Canada.*

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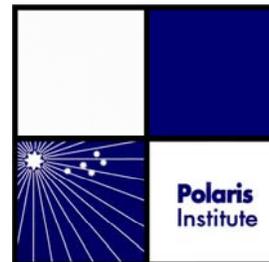
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## 1. Overview

Since 2005, the Polaris Institute has worked with students at Canadian universities to raise awareness about the impacts of bottled water use. A major concern voiced by students on these campuses and others is the lack of water fountains in university buildings and the pervasiveness of bottled water.

This report explores the Good, the Bad and the Ugly of water fountain access at Canadian universities and colleges. The Good looks at what kind of reinvestment in public tap water infrastructure is happening on campus, the Bad, presents cases where water fountains have blatantly been excluded from new buildings, and the Ugly, looks at what makes it is possible for a Canadian institution to design and construct a new building without water fountains.

The report's findings show a disturbing trend of some institutions decommissioning water fountains in older buildings and excluding water fountains in new buildings. In these cases students, staff and faculty are left to either bring water from home, drink from bathroom sinks or purchase bottled water. The elimination or exclusion of water fountains is considered alongside the converging trends of rising bottled water consumption and increases in beverage exclusivity contracts culminating in a picture of privatized water delivery on campus.



University of Waterloo

The report concludes with a set of recommendations for university and government regulators that will help increase access to publicly delivered tap water at academic institutions.

Despite the disturbing situation at some institutions, there are some glimmers of hope that the tide is turning in favour of a resurgence of drinking water fountains on public university and college campuses in Canada.

## 2. The Good

- The University of Toronto's \$111 million Bahen Centre for Information Technology which opened in 2002 has water fountains on every floor. None of the fountains included water spouts to easily fill refillable water bottles.<sup>1</sup>
- The University of Guelph's new Science Complex, completed in 2007, has 18 fountains throughout the building – yet, none of the fountains included water spouts.<sup>2</sup>
- In March 2009, the University of Winnipeg became the first university in Canada to ban the purchase and sale of bottled water on campus. The university plans on adding more water fountains and water bottle re-fill stations with locations indicated through clear signage.
- The ban at the University of Winnipeg is a direct result of student advocacy and action on the bottled water issue. While U of W is the first university in Canada to end the purchase and sale of bottled water on campus 32 other institutions across the country have bottled water free zones somewhere on campus. The Bottled Water Free Zones Campaign and other student action on bottled water include strong calls for administrations to reinvest in water fountains. Students at these institutions are also responding to the negative environmental and social impacts of bottled water consumption. This has become a national movement that is resulting in some university administrations agreeing to add water fountains on campus, including Memorial, Ottawa and Winnipeg.

## 3. The Bad

- The 9,000 m<sup>2</sup> (97,000 square feet) \$17.3 million INCO Innovation Centre at Memorial University, which opened in 2005, was constructed with no drinking water fountains. In the summer of 2009, four years after the building opened, Memorial University administration announced that it would be adding new water fountains in 12 buildings included the Inco Innovation Centre. This announcement only came after a coalition of organizations at Memorial made recommendations to the administration regarding access to drinking water on campus.<sup>3</sup>
- In 2003 McMaster University reopened Hamilton Hall after an \$8.5 million remake that completely altered the design of the building. Unfortunately accessible water fountains seem to have been left out of the plan. The only water fountains located in the building – one on each of the second and third floors and one in the basement – are located in low traffic areas and are poorly constructed making them inaccessible to large numbers of the campus community.<sup>4</sup>
- Dalhousie University's \$25 million Kenneth C. Rowe Management Building which houses four schools in the Faculty of Management opened to much fanfare in 2005. The five-story, 11,000 m<sup>2</sup> (119,000 square feet) building was

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<sup>1</sup> Data compiled by student volunteers, coordinated by the Polaris Institute.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

constructed with only one water fountain situated on the main floor outside of high traffic areas.<sup>5</sup>

- Simon Fraser University (SFU) recently completed two new buildings, neither of which have water fountains. The 9,664 m<sup>2</sup> (104,000 square feet) three-storey Technology and Sciences Complex I (TASC 1), which opened in 2005, houses Computing Sciences, Resource Environmental Management and Earth Sciences. Two years later, in 2007, SFU opened its 12,670 m<sup>2</sup> (136,390 sq. ft.) Technology and Sciences Complex 2 (TASC 2), which houses the university's Applied Science, Health, Materials Science and Animal Care programs. Both buildings incorporated energy saving and sustainable design concepts; however, the omission of water fountains is a major oversight.<sup>6</sup>



Queens University

- In June 2008, the lack of access to drinking water fountains at the University of British Columbia began to receive public attention when Adrian Dix, the B.C. New Democratic Party's health critic stated that most of the university's new buildings have "one, two, or no fountains at all." In response, UBC's associate vice-president of land and building services Geoff Atkins was quoted saying that because drinking water fountains are not required under B.C. building codes there

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

- is no obligation to install them and that students should fill up their water bottles from the tap.<sup>7</sup>
- Student researchers and faculty have found that water fountains in older buildings on campus are being decommissioned or left in disrepair:
    - In February 2009, a Dalhousie University student run group SustainDal, completed a full audit of the university's water fountains that found that one-third of Dalhousie's water fountain infrastructure showed symptoms of neglect and were deemed inadequate.<sup>8</sup>



University of Waterloo

- Fully 33% of respondents to a 2008 survey<sup>9</sup> of corporate influence on Canadian universities noticed a reduction in the number of water fountains on their campus, and 43% said that they noticed delays in repairing water fountains. The comments were explicit: some respondents mentioned the prevalence of decommissioned or broken water fountains, the absence of regular maintenance, and in some cases the complete lack of any water fountains in new buildings.<sup>10</sup> At least one survey response suggested that custodial staff had been instructed not to repair broken fountains.
- Documents from Carleton University in Ottawa highlight how campus operations, in this case Carleton's Physical Plant Services, have in the past issued directives indicating that fountains would only be repaired, if possible, and if they could not be repaired, they would not be replaced.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Girard, R., Shaker, E., "Bottled up or tapped out: Where have all the water fountains gone?," Academic Matters, January 2009,

[http://www.academicmatters.ca/current\\_issue.article.gk?catalog\\_item\\_id=2075&category=featured\\_articles](http://www.academicmatters.ca/current_issue.article.gk?catalog_item_id=2075&category=featured_articles)

<sup>8</sup> Pritchard, G., "Water Fountain Assessment Report: Dalhousie University", February, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> The survey was conducted by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Polaris Institute.

<sup>10</sup> Shaker, E. et al, "Corporate Initiatives on Campus: A 2008 Snapshot", Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2008, <http://www.polarisinstitute.org/files/Corporate%20Initiatives%20Snapshot.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Carleton University, Joint Health and Safety Committee Meeting #142, Minutes of January 25, 2006 Meeting, 05-21 Drinking Water Fountains, <http://www.carleton.ca/ehs/ehsjhsc/minutes/minutes142-25jan06.pdf>

## 4. The Ugly

The disappearance of water fountains is caused by a combination of trends including insufficient building codes and regulation, the increase of bottled water consumption, beverage exclusivity contracts and the de-prioritizing of public infrastructure.

### 4.1 Building codes

We now come to the question of what has made it possible for so many new multimillion dollar university buildings to be constructed without water fountains and how older fountains can be decommissioned and left in disrepair.

The simple answer is that provincial and federal building codes do not require building plans to include drinking fountains. For example, Ontario's building code<sup>12</sup> states that "on every floor where work will be performed and within 100 m of any area where work will be performed, *potable* water shall be provided from, (a) a fountain with an upward jet, (b) a tap from a piped water supply, or (c) a tap from a covered vessel." This means that new buildings must provide drinking water access from a drinking water fountain, a tap or a water jug."

It is therefore perfectly acceptable under Ontario's building code to simply have a tap in a bathroom as the main source of drinking water in a public building. What is remarkable is that for planning committees at post secondary institutions the decision to include water fountains or to rely on vending machines and bathroom sinks comes down to money. Accessibility is not an issue when adhering to the building codes. This allows planners to cut costs by excluding drinking water fountains.

Omitting water fountains leads to the increasingly private, for-profit delivery of drinking water on campuses in the form of bottled water. Faced with either putting ones' head under a bathroom tap or purchasing bottled water, students, faculty and staff will most likely choose the latter.

### 4.2 Bottled water sales and exclusive beverage contracts

The advent of beverage exclusivity contracts and the rapid growth of bottled water sales over the past fifteen years have clearly de-emphasized the importance of drinking fountains for university planners. Bottled water sales in Canada almost doubled between 2003 and 2008, growing from sales figures of \$809 million in 2003 to \$1.6 billion in 2008. This unprecedented growth was made possible through intense advertising campaigns that successfully made bottled water into a status symbol.

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<sup>12</sup> Canada has a National Building Code that is used as a model code for legally binding Provincial building codes. Each Provincial building code is based on the National Building Code with some modifications to suit the Province.

While bottled water was in its ascendancy, two of the big four global bottled water giants – Coca Cola and PepsiCo<sup>13</sup> – were targeting 18-24 year old market by signing exclusive distribution deals with universities. In Canada this represents an influential market of 1.6 million,<sup>14</sup> with significant spending power and (generally) no dependents. According to one campus marketing firm, the 18-24 Canadian student demographic represents an annual \$2 billion in non-academic expenditures.<sup>15</sup>

Typically, a beverage company will sign a deal with a university that will give the company exclusive rights to sell its products in vending machines throughout the campus, in cafeterias and convenience stores. In return universities receive money from the company. One of the first Canadian universities to sign such a contract was the University of British Columbia which arranged a deal with Coca-Cola in 1995.<sup>16</sup> Since then, dozens of Canadian universities and colleges have signed with either beverage giant. According to the 2008, CCPA, CUPE and Polaris campus survey 54% of respondents indicated their university had an exclusive arrangement with Coca-Cola, and 40% indicated their institution had a similar arrangement with PepsiCo.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4.3 Commercialization of campus

Exclusive contracts, meteoric bottled water sales and the limited access to publicly delivered tap water on Canadian campuses has led to the privatized delivery of water. This is an effect of the commercialization of education in general and higher education in particular.

Privatized water delivery in the form of bottled water is just one commercial influence at Canadian schools. Others include: branding initiatives; sponsorship of research, programs and buildings; privatized delivery of goods and services; an increasing reliance on private sources of funding from either individuals as donations or tuition fees, or from corporations.<sup>18</sup>

Building codes allow university planners and developers to get away with excluding water fountains, while bottled water and those who sell it through exclusive contracts are more than happy to quench thirsty students and staff with their own brand of privatized water delivery.

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<sup>13</sup> Danone and Nestlé are the other two bottled water giants

<sup>14</sup> Canadian Student Marketing promotional material.

<sup>15</sup> Girard, R., Shaker, E., “Bottled up or tapped out: Where have all the water fountains gone?,” Academic Matters, January 2009,

[http://www.academicmatters.ca/current\\_issue.article.gk?catalog\\_item\\_id=2075&category=featured\\_articles](http://www.academicmatters.ca/current_issue.article.gk?catalog_item_id=2075&category=featured_articles)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.oipcbc.org/orders/2001/Order01-20.html>

<sup>17</sup> Shaker, E. et al, “Corporate Initiatives on Campus: A 2008 Snapshot”, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2008, <http://www.polarisinstitute.org/files/Corporate%20Initiatives%20Snapshot.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Girard, R., Shaker, E., “Bottled up or tapped out: Where have all the water fountains gone?,” Academic Matters, January 2009,

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## **5. What can be done?**

As mentioned above, promoting access to public water sources and resisting the consumption and marketing of bottled water has spread quickly at Canadian universities. Championing this movement is the University of Winnipeg, which banned the purchase and sale of bottled water early in 2009.

The municipal “back to the tap” movement – with a number of Canadian municipalities passing resolutions limiting the sale of bottled water in city buildings and reinvesting in drinking water fountain - combined with the growing momentum of the student movement, serves as a useful model for academic institutions wishing to follow suit, particularly if universities intend to live up to their publicized environmental responsibilities.

At Carleton University, for example, the planning principles which guide the design and placement of buildings, landscapes, and infrastructure state that sustainable campus development should include moving toward eliminating waste and pollution. Eliminating water fountains and leaving wasteful products like bottled water as the only option for hydration is incongruous with these claims of sustainability.

Further, national and provincial building codes should make water fountains a requirement in all public buildings, and provincial and federal regulators need to emphasize access to clean, potable public drinking water. Legislating the inclusion of water fountains is a first step which will help combat the commodification of drinking water in public spaces, and ensure access to this vital resource.

## **6. Conclusion**

This report has highlighted Good, Bad and Ugly trends of access to publicly delivered drinking water on Canadian campuses. The Bad and Ugly trends suggest that the convergence of exclusive beverage deals and increased bottled water consumption, with the disturbing examples of blatant exclusion of water fountains in new university buildings is an effect of creeping corporatization of university campuses. Increasingly private, for-profit delivery of drinking water in the form of bottled water is the new norm.

However, students, faculty and staff are beginning to resist the loss of access to public water and are demanding that regulatory bodies inside and outside of the academic institution go back to the tap and move away from the reliance on bottled water. Clearly this requires more than simply scrapping exclusive beverage deals. The issue of funding priorities and fiscal resources must also be addressed. This would position the bottled water/tap water debate as central to the discussion of the impacts of privatization on public life and public institutions. And that’s most definitely a debate that needs to take place.